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ABSTRACT

The phonological rules at work in code-mixing of Hungarian and English are described, with special reference to Hungarian vowel harmony and its influence on the entire system. The corpus available for describing this code-mixture is a written text in the form of a casually written letter. Both Hungarian and English orthographic rules have influenced the text. Hungarian vowel harmony, the substitution of Hungarian vowel phonemes in English words, and suffix vowels in the text are described. It is concluded that the ability to replace English with Hungarian phonemes so that the word meant is readily understandable to a bilingual speaker results from the fact that both languages possess many corresponding phonemes. In English words containing vowels which correspond and can be substituted, English pronunciation appears to take precedence over spelling pronunciation. The extra English phonemes are also generalized to fit into the Hungarian system. (SW)

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VOWEL HARMONY AND CODE-MIXING: A Description of Phonemic Substitution in an American-Hungarian Text

Maria Dobozy

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Hungarians living in an American-Hungarian urban community exhibit unique code-mixing in their speech and have developed a code-mixture language which primarily follows the Hungarian phonological and morphological system. Such a language is recognized as an acceptable form of communication within the Hungarian-American community. Those participating in this code-mixing are usually bilinguals, but many of the members of such a community have learned English imperfectly, forgotten Hungarian, and are able to speak only this code-mixed language. The data available at this time for describing this code-mixture is a written text in the form of a letter written in casual style. It is 300 words long and contains 29% English lexical items interspersed. Only English nouns and verbs (and necessarily proper nouns) are used to supplement the Hungarian lexicon. These items are incorporated into the phonological and morphological structure of the Hungarian language. The primary goal of this paper is to describe the phonological rules at work in such a code-mixture, with special reference to Hungarian vowel harmony and its influence on the entire system.

There are several difficulties working with a written text. It is first necessary to determine the orthographic rules at work before any phonological description can begin. Both Hungarian (H) and English (E) orthographic rules have influenced the text. Only when this relationship has been analysed can one begin to describe the phonological system. All conclusions must in the end take into consideration the inability of any national orthography to reproduce exact phonetic information.

A glossed version of the letter is included at the end of the paper.

The Hungarian Phonemes And Their Orthographic Equivalents

/ɒ/	a	/f/	f	/n/	n	/t/	t
/a/	a	/g/	g	/ɲ/	ny	/c/	ty
/b/	b	/ɟ/	gy	/o/	o	/u/	u
/ts/	c	/h/	h	/o:/	o	/u:/	u
/tʃ/	cs	/i/	i	/ø/	o	/y/	ü
/d/	d	/i:/	i	/ø:/	o	/y:/	ü
/dz/	dz	/j/	j, ly	/p/	p	/v/	v
/dʒ/	dzs	/k/	k	/r/	r	/z/	z
/ɛ/	e	/l/	l	/ʃ/	s	/ʒ/	zs
/e/	e	/m/	m	/s/	sz		

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The contrast between the Hungarian long vowels: /u:, y:, i:, o:, ø:/ and their short counterparts is being lost in current spoken Hungarian, but the long vowels are still retained in writing. I have included them for the sake of completeness. In order to simplify the comparison between English and English and Hungarian vowels, E /ə/ is treated as a surface phoneme.

Hungarian Orthography in the Text

It is necessary to first explain that Hungarian orthography includes phonetic and etymological notation. Laszlo Deme states that, "...morphophonemic changes are indicated (i.e. the alternatives are discerned) while morphophonetic ones (assimilation and fusion) are not."[1] In this casual letter all the Hungarian words are correct, with the absence of diacritical marks. This causes no problem for a native speaker, however. There is one incomprehensible set of letters: ektota. In addition, there are some obvious typographical errors. In two cases two words are written together: vorrizoka, which should read: vorrizok a, and drajort which should read: drajort is. Two words are misspelled: shsndrit should be shandrit and it should be itt. When the word, hanimun, occurs the second time, the 'i' is left out.

Hungarian spelling has been carried over to the E words relatively systematically. The vowel phonemes which correspond quite consistently are: / i, e, ɛ, a, o, u, ai/. The use of H "sz, cs, dzs," in E words is regular. H /t/ replaces E /θ/ as in fort 'fourth'. Likewise the H /d/ replaces E /ð/ in braderje 'brother'. The text indicates E diphthongs with offglides by using 'j.' Thus, license is spelled lajszensz and appointment as apojntment.

The influence of E orthography must not be forgotten during analysis. H spelling can indicate pronunciation even when interference from E orthography has made it inconsistent. Some examples will make this clear. E /w/ is usually written 'v' in vorrizok 'worry', halovinra 'Halloween', vasort 'washer', vekesont 'vacation'. There are two exceptions: welfereshek 'welfare' and waccolom 'watch'. E /ʃ/ is written with 's' in vasort and vekesont. The standard E spelling 'sh' also occurs: Shorlivel 'with Shirley', shrabokat 'shrubs', shapban 'in the shop', finishelem 'I finish', and kesshel 'with cash'. In this last example a combination of H and E spelling rules appear. In order to double a digraph H orthography dictates that one double the first letter only ('sz' becomes 'ssz', etc.). Consequently, the E 'sh' in kesshel has been doubled to become 'ssh'. The same is true for the E 'ch' in waccsolom 'I watch'.

The spelling of E words in this text is affected more by H pronunciation (H phoneme substitution) and H spelling than by E spelling conventions. Therefore, it is relatively safe to assume the pronunciation of an E word in the H text.

A Short Description of H Vowel Harmony (VH)

Vowel harmony creates a tendency to combine identical or similar vowels in adjoining syllables or in all the syllables of a word. Front vowels are matched with front, back with back, and rounded with rounded vowels if possible. This tendency operates in the stems as well as across morphological boundaries. Thus, many H stems of more than one syllable have only front, only back, or only rounded vowels.

Front vowels: török, kicsi, meleg felleg, sűrű
Back vowels: alma, halad, forog, sárkány, kuruc

The most striking effect of VH is found in the morphophonemic alternations. To each stem may be added a number of morphological suffixes and prefixes. The H system of suffixes allows for vowel harmony in that each morpheme has at least two forms, one with a back vowel to accomodate words containing the back vowels, /a, á, o, ó, u, ú/, and another with a front vowel which harmonizes with stems having the front vowels, /ü, ű, ö, ő/. Some morphemes have three possible forms, each containing a front, back, and a rounded vowel. The stem vowels, /i, í, e, é/, are neutral.[2] The suffix morphemes may be considered to contrast within their own system of possible choices. There are three common sets of alternating vowels:

Front/back: /ɒ-ɛ/ as in -ba/be
Front/back: /o-ø/ as in -tol/től
Back rounded, front rounded, and front or unrounded: /o, ø, ɛ/ as in -hoz, -höz, -hez

In words of one syllable and of two syllables with identical vowels, the suffix vowel is clear. In 2-3 syllable words or in words with several suffixes, the last non-neutral stem vowel influences the succeeding suffix vowel.

	gloss	stem	'into' ba/be	'from' tól/től	'off of' ról/ről	'to' hoz/höz/hez
1.	bucket	vödör	vödörbe	vödörtöl	vödörröl	vödörhöz
2.	heat	meleg	melegbe	melegtől	melegről	meleghez
3.	hat	kalap	kalapba	kalaptól	kalapról	kalaphoz
4.	shoe	cipő	cipőbe	cipőből	cipőről	cipőhöz
5.	gate	kapu	kapuba	kaputól	kapuról	kapuhoz
6.	comb	fésű	fésűbe	fésűtől	fésűről	fésűhöz
7.	red	piros	pirosba	pirostól	pirosról	piroshoz
8.	debt	adóság	adóságba	adóságtól	adóságról	adósághoz
9.	thermometer	lázmérő	lázmérőbe	lázmérőtől	lázmérőről	lázmérőhöz

Preceeding suffix vowels may influence the succeeding ones: If the possessive plural infix is added, adósághoz → adóságjainkhoz, but lázméröhöz → lázméröinkhez. The -hoz suffix is retained because of the back vowels. The -höz is replaced by the unrounded -hez because of the /i/ in the infix which is neutral for front-back contrast, but not for roundness.

For suffixes beginning with a consonant, auxiliary vowels are necessary when words end in a consonant. There are four such vowels, two back; /a, o/ and two front, /e, ö/ This yields a four-way possibility for the possessive suffix.

1 sg. possessive suffix: -m > -am, om, em, öm
2 pl. possessive suffix: -tok/tek > -atok, otok, etek, ötök

younger sister: hugom, hugotok
bed: ágyam, ágyatok
pocket: zsebem, zsebetek

Phonological rules which determine the vowels in the suffixes can also cause changes in the stem. Such regressive assimilation produces alternations in H nouns. The final stem vowel is sometimes changed by the suffix. Certain suffixes require a long vowel and others a short one: a '-'marks the morpheme boundary in the following examples:

	long	short
'hand'	kéz (nom.)	
	kéz-en	kez-ek
	kéz-nek	kez-em
	kéz-röl	kez-et

Vowel endings seem to cause haplology in the stem. Often too many identical syllables would follow each other if they were not suppressed:

'room'	terem + em	*terememe	termem, termek
'soot'	korom + om		kormom, kormok
but:			
'battery'	elem + ek		elemek
'Turk'	török + ök		törökök

The Substitution of H Vowel Phonemes in E Words

The base forms shall be discussed first.

/ə/ > /ɛ/ C-C in unstressed syllables preceeding a nasal:

present > prɛzɛnt
president > prɛzident
unemployment > ɔnɛmplojment

/ə/ > /ɛ/ V-C in unstressed syllables proceeding a liquid:

bicentennial	>	bajsɛntɛniɛl

/ə/ > /o/ C-C in unstressed syllables preceeding a nasal:

cousin	>	kʊzon
emblem	>	ɛmblom
vacation	>	vekeʃon
television	>	tɛlɛviʒon

E spelling does not interfere with the first two examples, but may have an influence in the last two cases.

/ə/ > /ø/ C-C stressed position preceeding /r/:

girlfriend	>	gørlfrɛnd
Shirley	>	Sørli

/ə/ > /ø/ C-C unstressed final position preceeding /r/:

toaster	>	tostør
dryer	>	drajør
washer	>	vaʃør
mixer	>	mixør
picture	>	piktʃør

/ə/ > /o/ stressed, preceeding /r/:

worry	>	vorri

May be caused by E spelling but it is also unstressed before /l/:

bridal	>	brajdol

Exceptions: /ə/ followed by /i/ in next syllable:

/ər/ > /ɛr/ in unstressed final position:

corner	>	kornɛri
brother	>	bradɛrjɛ

/ər/ > /ɛr/ in unstressed medial position:

lottery	>	lottɛri
bakery	>	bɛkɛri

The final two examples may be influenced by the following vowel:

/ə/ > /u/ There is only 1 example:

surprise > suprajz

This may have been influenced by E spelling.

/ə/ > /ɒ/ C-C stressed:

bloodtest	>	blɒdtɛst
lucky	>	lɒki
honeymoon	>	hɒnimun
cousin	>	kɒzon
brother	>	brɒdɛr

Also found in initial, unstressed position:

unemployment > ɒnemplojment

/æ/ > /a/ or /ɒ/ unstressed, interconsonantal:

Halloween > hɒlovin

Because of the lack of diacritical marks, it is not clear whether the 'a' was pronounced /a/ or /ɒ/.

/æ/ > /ɛ/ C-C stressed:

marriage	>	mɛrid3
blankets	>	blɛnkɛtɛkɛt
can	>	kɛn

Also in unstressed syllable:

Thanksgiving > tɛnksgiving

/ɹ/ > /i/ C-C in unstressed syllables:

marriage	>	mɛrid3
mortgage	>	morgid3
garbage	>	gɒrbid3
department	>	diportmɛnt

Monophthongization: /au/ > /a/

shower > saørt

/iə/ > /ɛ/ or /e/

Sears > sɛrz or serz

Metathesis: ironingboard: E /aiərn-/ > ajroningbordot
This may be a spelling pronunciation.

In one instance an extra syllable is added.

Niagara Falls > E /naiægrə/ > najgorɒ

There are words in which two pronunciations of a stem vowel are possible. This situation is caused by the lack of diacritical marks in the text. In most cases E pronunciation is a guide in determining the most likely pronunciation. One must remember, however, that E pronunciation serves as a basis for replacement of phonemes only so far as the phonemes do not conflict with vowel harmony. The following sets of vowels cannot always be distinguished in the text:

á/a é/e, o/ö, u/ü = /a-ɒ/, /e-ɛ/, /o-ø/, u-y/

In the following examples the first of each set is the more likely pronunciation. The word shower may be pronounced /ʃa:ørt/or/ʃa:ort/. The inflected forms help to determine the quality of the vowel in question since they limit the number of variants possible. Thus, we read

ʃa:ørre instead of ʃa:orrɛ
hɛdʒkɒtørrɛl instead of hɛdʒkɒtorrɛl

because the latter would violate vowel harmony. For the sake of VH, the suffix chosen wou'd have been -al if /or/ were in the stem. In /piktʃørøn/'picture' it is possible the author chose the -on suffix to make the word /piktʃorɒn/, but since the /i/ is a front vowel, the tendency would probably be to keep the others front as well. In other examples, such as/vɒʃørt/'washer,' /vɒʃort/, /drajørt/ 'dryer' or /drajort/, it is difficult to decide because /ø/ coincides with E pronunciation but not with VH. They must both have the same vowel as the rest of the words in this single series in lines 11 and 12. I assume /ø/ is meant because the other examples with suffixes have this vowel.

/a-ɒ/

/mɛgsajnoltɒ/ 'he signed' or/mɛgsɒjnoltɒ/: The first is closer to E pronunciation. /najgorɒ/ 'Niagara Falls' or/nɒjgorɒ/: The first is closer to E pronunciation, but the temptation to have identical vowels in a word might override the E. In this case I have no preference.

/e-ɛ/

/vɛlferɛʃɛk/ 'welfare people' or/vɛlfɛrɛʃɛk/ is possible. The first is closer to the pronunication in some E dialects, the second to VH. An alternation may be possible between the inflected and the uninflected forms; /erplennɛl/ by'airplane' seems to be the most plausible of several

possibilities for the author's version of airplane. Both E pronunciation and VH coincide in this choice.

The pronunciation of one H word is not clear because of a facultative change: /levø/and /lɛvø/.

A pronunciation peculiarity: the initial /ə/ has been dropped from /əlectric/ > /lektrik/. This indicates that the author does not use H stress (which is always on the first syllable) exclusively when using the code-mixture. The initial /ə/ may have been left off because he has learned the stress of some E words and carries this over incompletely so that the syllable he stresses becomes the initial syllable of the word.

Description of the Suffix Vowels in the Text

Intra-stem VH causes a tendency to equalize the vowels in a word, as in

bicentennial > bajsɛnteniɛl

Neither E spelling nor pronunciation can cause this. The /ə/ in lottery and bakery appears to be conditioned by the following /i/, thus:

lottery	>	lotɛ:i
bakery	>	bekɛri or bɛkɛri

Vacation > /vekeʃont/ has probably been influenced by E spelling, or it would have become /vekeʃɛnt/.

Most E words fit easily into the VH patterns when a suffix is added. Suffixes occur in the same order and have the same phonetic influence on each other when attached to H and E words.

budget	>	bodʒɛtomot
girlfriend	>	gørlfrɛndɛmmɛl
cake	>	kekɛt
truck	>	trokok

E /ə/, accented and unaccented, is replaced freely by almost any H vowel needed to fit the VH. Therefore, regressive assimilation is at work. The endings determine the stem vowel, where there is room for choice. E /ə/ is the vowel which is least similar to any H vowel. E /æ/ is also treated this way.

present	>	prɛzentɛt
basement	>	besmɛntbɛ
unemployment	>	onemplojmenten
blankets	>	blɛnkɛteket
ham	>	hɛmɛt

The possibility of making all vowels identical must be a great temptation.

Suffix vowels suggest the pronunciation of H /ø/ for E /ə/: picture becomes /pikt∫ørt/ and /pikt∫ørøn/ and hedgecutter > /hɛdʒkotørrɛl/ with /ø/ because of the 2 possible endings: -el/-al. Based upon these examples it is safe to assume that mixer, toaster, etc. in lines 11 and 12 are all pronounced with a final /ør/.

Alternate forms may well appear. There is not enough evidence in this text to be certain. In some words it may be likely:

*kornór -- kornɛri
*brodór -- brodɛrjɛ

In both cases the ending probably causes the vocalic alternation. Also, */vɛlfer/-- /vɛlfɛrɛsɛk/ may be possible, but another possible pronunciation is /vɛlfɛrɛsɛk/ which would not contradict VH.

When a word has a back and a neutral vowel it is often considered back. One expects /kolɛktalmok/ but /kolɛktɛznɛk/ can also be heard.

VH seems to cause haplology in E stems:

potatosalad > potetosɛldɛt

Special infixes making foreign words and nouns into verbs also have front and back counterparts: -olni/-elni, -ozni/-ezni. (These endings are underlined with a double line in the glossed text). A verb with a front vowel is finishelem /finiʃɛlɛm/ ' I finish.' An example with a neutral vowel is trimolni /trimolni/ 'trim.' The form kirentelok 'rent' is wrong. *kirentolok is acceptable and kirentelek /kirɛntɛlɛk/ is the most desirable because of the 3 identical vowels. The -elok might be a typographical mistake since it is the only instance of 2 endings not in agreement. A verb with a back vowel is /vorrizok/ the stem /o/ is followed by an /o/ ending. For an /ø/ before /r/ the ending would have to be /-ɛk/. The /i/ following the /r/ may prevent the /o/ from being rounded.

Kazonjei /kozonjɛi/ is an anomaly. It is influenced neither by E spelling nor E pronunciation nor VH. There is no definitive explanation and it could possibly be a typographical error.

Some E words have become standard in H. After many generations of use, words such as ókantri 'old country,' kárέ 'car,' and shandri 'shed' are not recognized as originally E words. Some words have undergone drastic phonetic change.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the imprecise phonetic information transmitted by a written text, some conclusions may be drawn. First, the ability to replace E with H phonemes so that the word meant is readily understandable to a bilingual speaker results from the fact that both languages possess many corresponding phonemes. In E words containing vowels which correspond

and can be substituted, E pronunciation appears to take precedence over spelling pronunciation. Secondly, the extra E phonemes are generalized to fit into the H system. Sometimes the next closest H vowel is chosen, but more often the choice is determined by the other vowels in the word. If the non-corresponding E vowels are considered to be neutral, then the H speaker's perception of these vowels (E /æ,ə/) is probably colored by the front-back distinctions governing VH and can be replaced by the nearest front or back vowel appropriate to the endings used. VH in H proper places constraints on the choice of suffix vowels for each noun and verb. VH is therefore progressive. When carried over to E words used with the H morphological units, the suffixes place constraints on the stem vowels, which are flexible, and cause variations in pronunciation which deviate not only from E pronunciation, but also from E orthography. Since H has neutral vowels, the possibilities for using both front and back suffix vowels increases, the number of combinations is enlarged and a rather wide range of variation is allowed. The many possible substitutions for E /ə/ indicate that the entire system in American-Hungarian is in flux.

Footnotes

1 László Demes. 1972 Standard Hungarian. The Hungarian Language. ed. Lőránd Benkö and Samu Imre (The Hague: Mouton), p. 295.

2 Robert Vágó. 1973 Abstract vowel harmony systems in Uralic and Altaic languages. Language 49. p. 592.

Appendix: The Glossed Text

Key

English stems: .....
Hungarian pre fixes and suffixes· _____
Hungarian infixes making foreign words and non-verbs into verbs: ======

1. Nagy hirt mondok: a gorlfrendemmel, Shorlivel
   with my girlfriend with Shirley

2. halovinra visszuk a merridzs lajszenszunket.
   for Halloween marriage license (poss, I pl)

3. Mar csinaltunk is egy appointmentet a bladteszthez.
   appointment for a bloodtest
   (acc)

4. Tenksgivinkor vikendkor megyunk a hanimunra
   at Thanksgiving on the weekend for the honeymoon

5. a Naigara Falszra.
   to Niagara Falls

6. Ezutan igyekszem megmagyarazni az olyan szavakat amiket esetleg

7. nem ert.

8. Tegnap szuprajz brajdol shaort csinaltak Shorlinek a
   surprise bridal shower (acc) for Shirley

9. kazonjei.
   cousins (poss, pl)

10. (Szuprajz azt jelenti hogy nem tudta.)
    surprise

11. Kapott sok prezentet; mikszort, tosztort, ajroningbordot,
    presents mixer toaster ironingboard
    (acc,sg) (acc) (acc) (acc)

12. blenketeket, meg egy vasort es drajort is.
    blankets washer dryer
    (acc, pl) (acc) (acc)

13. Most mar nem kell a landriba jarni
to the laundry

14. Ma muffoltuk be oket a beszmentbe.
move into the basement
(1 pl, past)

15. A shaore a Shorli braderje a bekeribol hozott egy
for the shower Shirley's brother from the bakery
(nom, poss)

16. keket meg rengeteg kukit.
cake (acc) cookies (acc, sg)

17. Masok meg potetoszeldet, hemet es kendit hoztak.
potatosalad (acc) ham (acc) candy (acc)

18. Shorli a bjuti shapban sokat overtajmozik a
Shirley at the beauty shop work overtime
(3 sg, present)

19. Szerz Robaknal.
at Sears Robuck

20. (Szerz Robak as egy dipartment stor ha nem tudna)
Sears Robuck(nom) department store (nom)

21. A hanimunra is alig kapott vekesont. Szeret szevolni.
for the honeymoon vacation(acc) to save (infin)

22. A karejat is kesshel fizette ki.
car(poss, acc) with cash

23. En meg anemplojmenten vagyok.
on unemployment

24. Amiota a prezident megszajnolta a anemplojment ektota
president sign unemployment ?
(nom) (3 sg, past)

25. azota nem vorrizok a morgizsom miatt.
worry mortgage
(1 sg, pres.) (poss, 1 sg)

26. Itt meg a welfereshek is karet drajvolnak.
welfare people car drive
(pl,nom) (acc) (3 pl, pres)

27. Ha waccsolom a badzsetomat meg loterire is telik a.
watch (I sg, pres) budget (I sg, poss, acc) for the lottery

28. Mihelyt laki leszek elmegyek az okantriba erplennel.
lucky to the old country by airplane

29. majd meglatja egyszer csak megallok a maga hazanal.

30. Valamelyik oficon majd kirentelok egy karet es maganak
in office rent (I sg, pres, acc end) car (acc)

31. is adok egy rajdot.
ride (acc)

32. Mihelyt laki leszek indulok.
lucky

33. Akkor viszek maganak amit ker.

34. It kuldok egy pikcsort a hazamrol.
picture (acc)

35. Amint latja itt a jard korul nincs fenc.
yard (nom) fence (nom)

36. A drajve mellett levo shrabokat az elektrik hedzskatorrel
driveway (nom) shrubs (acc, pl) electric hedgecutter (with)

37. szoktam trimolnni
trim (infin)

38. (lektrik azt jelenti hogy villanydrot vezet rola a hazba.
electric

39. A korneri shandriba is be van vezetve a villany.
corner shed (in)

40. Nem szoktam becsukni a shandrit pedig sok minden van benne.
shed (acc)

41. A pikcsoron latszik egy kekpiros szajn.
on the picture sign (nom)

42. Az egy bajszenteniel emblom.
bicentennial emblem

43. It a lakossag van a bajszenntenniel maniaban.
bicentennial

44. En meg nem estem beie teljesen.

45. Az emberek milliokat ke[illegible]ek ra az egesz orszagban.

46. A jovo fort of dzulajkor lesz olyan varos ahol az emberek meg
fourth of July (at)

47. sem tudnak majd mozdulni.

48. Most latom a televizsonon hogy mar a let let shonak is
on television late-late show

49. vege van.

50. Jobb ha befinishelem a levelemet.
finish (1 sg, pres)

51. Meg a garbidzskeneket is ki kell raknom mert egy par ora
garbage cans (acc, pl)

52. mulva mar kollektalnak a trakkok.
collect trucks
(3 pl, pres) (pl, nom)

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